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SUBJECT: JORDANIANS RALLY AGAINST YASSIN KILLING; VIOLENCE
MARS CAMP PROTESTS

REF: AMMAN 2197

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Jordanian expressions of anger and frustration after Israel's killing of HAMAS founder Sheikh Yassin were capped by large demonstrations throughout Jordan following Friday prayers on March 26. Security sources reported that the vast majority received prior approval from the government and came off without incident, but an unlicensed demonstration in an Amman refugee camp turned violent, resulting in property destruction, clashes with security forces, and arrests. The Islamic Action Front accused police of beating one of its members of Parliament during the fray, and Parliament is forming a committee to investigate the incident. For its part, the GOJ continued its show of solidarity with the public in protesting the assassination. King Abdullah in a press interview again condemned the attack. PM Faisal al-Fayez condoled Sheikh Yassin at the Palestinian Embassy and members of Parliament started a fund to raise money for the families of those killed in the attack. Jordanian officials thus far appear to have stayed one step ahead of the demonstrators by joining in street protests and sanctioning rallies to allow people to express their anger. End Summary.

FRIDAY PROTESTS LARGELY PEACEFUL, EXCEPT IN THE CAMPS

2. (SBU) Jordanian expressions of outrage over the March 22 Israeli killing of HAMAS leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin continued throughout the week, culminating in large protests after Friday prayers throughout Jordan on March 26. The GOJ authorized the vast majority of requests to demonstrate, and the security services were out in force throughout Jordan in anticipation of the protests. The largest protest again occurred at al-Hussein Mosque in downtown Amman (ref), where approximately 2,500 people rallied March 26 after Friday prayers, according to police sources. An estimated 700 also gathered at the Professional Associations building for a pro-Palestinian rally which highlighted political speeches. Many others demonstrated in separate rallies in Irbid, Ramtha, Mafraq, and Zarqa. The Islamic Action Front also organized protests in Ajloun, Sweileh, and Madaba, according to local press.

3. (SBU) Police reported that violence again erupted during demonstrations at al-Baqaa and al-Wihdat refugee camps when demonstrators and/or roving bands of youths carried out acts of vandalism and burned tires, resulting in clashes with police and arrests. The unruly situation in al-Wihdat prompted the Governor of Amman to seek intervention from member of Parliament and Islamic Action Front member Tayseer al-Fityani (presumably because the IAF had a role in organizing the rally). According to a statement from the IAF on the incident, al-Fityani, his son, and an attorney were beaten severely by police in the fray.

4. (SBU) The Interior Ministry provided a slightly different take on events, saying in a public statement that the demonstrations took an "unexpected turn," and "violated security and public order. (Protesters) attacked al-Ashrafiyah Police Center and the shops located on the main road, and set fire to tires in the middle of the road." It said that police intervened after demonstrators and shop owners and others clashed, resulting in arrests. According to Jordan's local news agency, a delegation representing al-Wihdat met with Interior Minister Habashneh the next day and denounced the "acts of sabotage" during the protests. MP Mohammad al-Kuz said citizens of the camp do not accept what happened, adding that there were a number of "intruders" who came only to lead the riots.

5. (U) During Parliament's session on March 28, Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali referred to the "regretful incidents" at al-Wihdat camp, saying: "The incidents, which we completely reject, include the destruction of private property and the burning of the Jordanian flag as well as an assault on MP

Tayseer al-Fityani." According to press reports, the Parliament will form a committee to investigate the incident.

KING CONDEMNS "EMBARRASSING" CRIME; MPS START MARTYRS FUND

16. (U) GOJ officials continued to show solidarity with Jordanians' opposition to the Israeli attack. In an interview with London-based al-Hayat newspaper (carried by Jordan's local press on March 29), King Abdullah described Yassin's assassination as a shocking crime, and called on the world community to put an end to Israel's "arbitrary measures." The King said: "This crime was very embarrassing to us because it occurred two days after I met with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon." He said the meeting with Sharon had left him with the impression that Israel would work with Jordan in moving the peace process forward, but Sharon instead carried out the attack. He added that he hoped during his Washington trip to determine "what we can do in support of the roadmap peace plan despite the fact that the Americans will be occupied with the forthcoming elections."

17. (U) Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez on March 24 visited the Palestinian Embassy to offer condolences. Members of Parliament and Arab ambassadors in Amman also visited the Embassy to pay their respects. In addition to the Palestinian Embassy in Amman, the Muslim Brotherhood and Najjar Family (cousins of Sheikh Yassin) also accepted condolences for the HAMAS leader. The Muslim Brotherhood -- which has close ties to HAMAS -- on March 24 and 25 also organized a ceremony in front of the Islamic Hospital in the Abdali area of Amman to "celebrate the martyrdom" of Sheikh Yassin.

18. (U) The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs earlier in the week announced special prayers would be held in Jordan's mosques for Sheikh Yassin. The Jordanian Cabinet and Parliament started their respective sessions on March 24 with a moment of silence and recitation of the Fatiha for the soul of the HAMAS leader. Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez declared that Jordan was "the first country to condemn Israeli crimes, and we shall not cease our moves until these crimes stop," according to local press reports.

19. (U) On March 24, more than 30 members of Parliament committed to giving 9JD (\$12.50) a month to the families of HAMAS members killed in the Israeli strike against Sheikh Yassin. In the days after Yassin's killing, many Jordanian cars displayed pictures of the deceased HAMAS leader in the rear window of their vehicles -- a place usually reserved for portraits of Jordan's kings. Jordanian newspapers were filled with condolences to HAMAS and Yassin's family.

COMMENT

10. (SBU) The GOJ managed to stay ahead of the demonstrators and limit incidents of violence by joining protests and making the decision from the beginning to allow people to rally and release steam. However, much anger remains, as well as even deepening skepticism about the roadmap process. Jordanians perceive that diplomatic efforts to revive the peace process are hopelessly stalled, and challenge the sincerity of Israeli leaders' commitment to a political process. Conversations with our interlocutors are tainted with a sense of foreboding that the situation across the river will only get worse.

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